

NEW SHOREHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE WORK SESSION

Block Island School

December 15, 2011

4:00 P.M.

The New Shoreham School Committee met in open session on Thursday, December 15, 2011, in the Block Island School cafeteria. Chair William Padien called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. The following members were present: Elizabeth Connor, Patricia Doyle, Ann Hall, Sean McGarry, and William Padien. Robert Hicks was also in attendance.

School Schedule Revision

Mr. Hicks gave some background information on the school schedule revision before starting the PowerPoint presentation. There are concerns about the amount of academic time students lose to attend athletic games. A committee of teachers, parents, students, and administrators was formed last spring to look at ways to address this problem. The School Committee had asked for a specific proposal that would be discussed, tweaked, and updated as needed. Mr. Hicks discussed the presentation with the students earlier this afternoon. He is hoping the School Committee can make a decision after the first of the year on whether to change the school day schedule.

The PowerPoint presentation addressed the following:

Underlying Principles – teacher-led instruction is critical to learning; we should assure student access to class time; athletic participation is a vital part of school; content learning and athletics should not compete for the same time.

What is the Problem? – currently students must leave school and miss class to participate in athletic games; a three-sport varsity athlete can miss as much as the equivalent of 18 days of school competing (10 percent of the school year); classes are seriously depleted when games occur, negatively affecting instruction; a student at a typical suburban high school is in school 95 percent of the time. Mr. Hicks had documents supporting the fact that academic learning time is critical to student achievement.

Who Owns the Problem? Which position best describes your view? – This is an upper grade problem, elementary shouldn't be affected; this is an athletics problem, let them solve it; we're in this together, we're one school and they're all our students; students should just make up missed work.

Solution Concepts – change the athletic schedule to fit within time available (i.e. its athletics' problem, not mine); change the schedule to accommodate athletics (i.e. athletics rule; adjust to it); find a balanced solution that accommodates academics and athletics reasonably (i.e. don't ask Congress to solve it); who should be impacted and how much? Mr. Hicks stated that teacher-led instruction is critical to learning and students need access to class time. Content learning and athletics should not compete for the same time.

A Proposal – lengthen the school day Monday through Thursday to seven hours (7:50-2:50); shorten Friday to a 12:20 p.m. dismissal, still requiring some missed time for Friday athletic travel; from 10:18-12:20 on Friday there are two periods that exceed the state required instructional time, are not part of the secondary content schedule, and would be missed by athletes on travel days (used K-12 for support, remediation, community linkages, presentation, and building school community); daily instructional minutes not counting Friday’s extra periods average 332 and, with the added two periods, average 350, a slight increase over current created by homeroom’s elimination; prohibit scheduling athletic contests Monday-Thursday, requiring a loss of some current games and likely prohibiting Rhode Island Interscholastic League participation (two of five teams now participate in RIIL). Mr. Hicks submitted a proposed schedule with eight periods Monday-Thursday and five periods on Friday, including the two elective periods. Homeroom and long block would be eliminated.

Variations – Option 1 – end school day earlier on Friday, reducing minutes to state minimum – less time than we have now; shorten school day Monday-Thursday to get to state minimum – cutting added time, not reach 330 minutes by Friday ferry; change school start and stop times to reduce impact on after school schedule (7:30-2:30?).

Variations – Option 2 – separate elementary and upper grade schedules – add bus costs, child care issues (?), middle grades questions, program impact with shared staff; apply change only during basketball season when lost time is the greatest – two changes each year with continued lost time; take two periods from Friday and spread across Monday-Thursday – less drastic change, but not complete solution.

Possible Athletic Schedule Flexibility – allow limited Monday-Thursday games; allow Monday-Thursday make-up games; allow limited Monday-Thursday home games; each of these cause some time out of class. However, Mr. Hicks was adamant that our obligation is to put students in front of teachers for the appropriate amount of time.

What we can move around – start and end times; period rotations; “elective” periods apply to some or all grades; lunch and recess schedules; more?

Next Steps – School Committee Monday night – review of feedback from this afternoon; modify/analyze/detail proposal; survey on updated proposals; review following survey; School Committee action; implementation planning

Several students were in attendance and stated that the teachers and the students were against changing the school schedule. They did not see any problems because many classes are set up for individual learning and basketball season, which is the season with most class time lost, is only three months long. The consensus of the adults in attendance was that there were two options: either get rid of the athletic program or modify the schedule. No one seemed interested in eliminating athletics. Mr. Hicks felt that the current schedule sends a message that being in school doesn’t matter. He reminded everyone that nothing was cut in stone, but asked how flexible we should be. Other attendance reasons were addressed briefly with the suggestion that the administration should enforce the rules in the handbook and possibly award students for good attendance. Another topic of discussion centered on whether games should be scheduled during

the week. Some thought an occasional home game should be allowed as every Friday and Saturday has been utilized for both home and away basketball games this year.

This topic will be discussed further at Monday evening's meeting.

Adjournment

A motion (Padien, Doyle) at 5:54 p.m. to adjourn carried with a vote of 3-0 with Sean McGarry and Ann Hall having left earlier.

Marsha L. Gutierrez, Clerk

Date approved: February 13, 2012